

THE MEANS AND MECHANICS OF MUKTI IN SAIVISM

1. INTRODUCTION

The gradual development and synthesis of the various strands of Indian thought on the subject of liberation find their fulfilment in the Bhakti tradition of Saivism and Vaishnavism both of which recognize the realities of God, World and the souls. In Buddhism, the bodhisathva takes life seriously and becomes the embodiment of selfless and compassionate activity combining in himself the ideals of the sublime contemplation with purely altruistic action. In Saiva Siddhanta ideal of Jeevanmukti as also in the Gita, there is ample scope for further development of this altruistic activity founded as they are on their doctrine of bhakti to the God of love, surrender to whom is the means and the end of liberated life on earth. Here renunciation and action, gnana and bhakti exist side by side. The attainment of peace and equanimity become of the goal of liberation and here Saiva Siddhanta introduces a new element through bhakti, the dimension of shoring, communion, total surrender to the will of God so that God abides in his devotees and they in Him. Bhakti, here, is the natural culmination of any mystical theory which makes room for the many as well as the one Love manifesting as the universal mutual attraction of all things to their centre, the Lord, and through the Lord to each other. “Anbe Sivam” – “Love itself is God-Siva” is the central theme of Saivism as elaborated in Thirumular’s THIRUMANTIRAM.

2. SIVA-RAJA YOGA AND SAIVA SIDDHANTA

The Bhakti tradition describes the jeevanmukta, the liberated man, as the passionless sage undisturbed by pain and pleasure – the athlete of the spirit whose integrated attitude reflects his total surrender to the Lord and thus living in communion with the Lord. The action he performs is no more a means towards any goal but a free and spontaneous expression of his spiritual realization. The jeevanmukta acts as the mere instrument of the Lord – in fact he is so utterly selfless and so closely united with the Lord that it is not he who acts but the Lord who lives and acts in him. Of the Hindu orthodox systems, Niyaya-Vaisesika and Purva Mimamsa schools do not admit the possibility of emancipation while the body remains while Samkhya-yoga, and Vedanta and Saiva Siddhanta formally accept jeevanmukti. The well-known Raja-Yoga of Patanjali as a systematic discipline towards liberation is accepted in some form or other by all the religious schools of India. Although the idea of God is not worked into the atheistic Samkhya metaphysics accepted by yoga, yoga goes further as in laying down the practical discipline it has recourse to meditation of God and His Grace. The culmination of this process is seen in Siva. Raja Yoga when liberation is deemed possible only by the descent of Lord Siva’s Grace on a ripe soul which had attained self-perfection through the right-fold discipline of Raja Yoga concurrently with the Ten-fold spiritual progress (Dasa-Kariya) of Saiva Siddhanta.

3. SAIVA LIBERATION AND YOGA PSYCHOLOGY

According to Samkhya-Yoga system, bondage is caused by avidya (ignorance) who's off-shoots are asmita (egoism), raga (attachment), dvesa (aversion) and abhinivesa (will to live). Avidya is similar to the concept of Anava in Saiva Siddhanta and both avidya and anava are beginningless and eternal. Although Samkhya holds that the way to liberation is knowledge alone, yoga maintains that discriminative knowledge is not sufficient for release and it is necessary that all the old habits of the thought process and the fluctuations of the mind-stuff are silenced as the way to release through constant practice and detachment. The eight-fold Yoga is divided into five parts called the bahiranga yoga (external) and into the last three parts called the antaranga yoga (internal). With the purification of the instrument of cognition the yogi gets intuitive knowledge leading firstly to perceive the difference between the soul (purusha) and nature (prakrti) and secondly to recognize the supreme Lord Siva as different from the soul. This spiritual enlightenment process is graded as evolving from pasa-gnana (the impermanence of Nature) through pasu-gnana (the dependence of the soul on God) and culminating in Siva-gnana, the experience of bliss in union with Lord Siva as the ultimate in Saiva Siddhanta liberation. Yoga is thus a means not for achieving the negative cessation of avidya with its consequent freedom from afflictions and actions but to attain the positive experience of spiritual bliss in union with the supreme.

4. MAYAVADA VEDANTA AND SAIVA SIDDHANTA

According to Samkhya-Yoga metaphysics, the only liberation possible after the removal of avidya is the state of Kaivalya (supreme isolation of the purusha from all contacts with prakriti) called Videkamukti, release after physical death. In contrast, jeevanmukti is recognized both in Mayavada (Advaita Vedanta) and Saiva Siddhanta although there are many differences between them, particularly the fact that Vedanta holds that God above is real while Siddhanta postulates God, souls and the world of Nature (Pasa or Bondage) as three eternal realities. The concept of jeevanmukti has been put forward because of the logical difficulty in postulating the co-existence of Saving knowledge (paravidya or Siva-gnanam) and ignorance (Avidya or anava) and the impossibility of differing the onset of knowledge in all cases until after physical death. After liberation, the world and the body cease to be real for the Mayavadin while the Siddhantin the world and the body continue to be real but serve as mere instruments of the Lord Siva who acts and lives in the jeevanmukta. Although Sankara lays great stress on gnaana and the life of sannyas (renunciation) as the way for mukti, MEIKANDAAR emphasizes bhakti or self-surrender as the path leading to God's Grace which alone can confer mukti. Again, the term Advaita is interpreted differently in both systems. For Sankara the unity of the soul with God is a oneness in identity whereas Meikandaar recognizes only a oneness in union in mukti when the soul and God remain distinct as they are two separate entities.

Sankara's contention that the Brahmajnani is Brahman itself loses its glamor when he fails to explain the continuation of prarabdha karma or the continuation of the body even after the attainment of mukti – the analogy of the potter's wheel continuing for a while is unconvincing, because the rotation of the wheel is real whereas the Mayavadins concede that

there can be nothing in the nature of phenomenal reality once avidya is removed. To say that this is only in the mind is unconvincing and finally Sankara falls back on the inner certainty of liberation and on the authority of the scriptures. Ramanuja denies jeevanmukti altogether and holds that no release can take place as long as a man lives. Perhaps, it is true to say in the jeevanmukti of the Advaita-Mayavada school's self-realization, the soul is stranded in singleness (Kaivalya); it is self-centered, and God-centered as the latter needs the Grace of God – a concept central to Saiva Siddhanta. For the Siddhantin, liberation is not merely freedom from the sufferings of life; nor the realization of the spiritual nature of the soul; it is a union with God in love; it is to be attained here and now. Here the jeevanmukta not only goes beyond passionless serenity but also now sees the world as an expression of the divine; he makes a comeback to the material world and to everyday life which now take on a new meaning. The powers and potentialities of the psychophysical organism are not suppressed but perfected so as to participate in the transformation that is brought about in the new life of the spirit. With the Grace of the Lord acting through him, he strives to lead all humanity towards final liberation.

5. SAIVA SIDDHANTA'S ANSWER TO EXISTENTIAL ANGUISH

Saiva Siddhanta is a living religion with a vast philosophical, religious and devotional literature of its own in Tamil – it has also the unique distinction of elaborating a view of jeevanmukti (liberation while still alive) consistent with a realistic metaphysics. Liberation (Moksha or Mukti) is the central issue of Indian philosophy where the science of salvation is acclaimed as the supreme goal of human life, culminating in freedom from all sufferings – particularly that of an existential void and the consequent anguish arising from the impermanence of life and the accumulation of unfulfilled desires to release from suffering lies in the capacity of the liberated man to transcend the pairs of opposites (loss and gain, happiness and sorrow), this duality in which we are caught up, as it were, by realizing the primacy of the spirit as the underlying unity in the phenomenal world of diversity, of names and forms. Although Hinduism lays great stress on the saving knowledge to liberation from Guru to disciple, Saiva Siddhanta holds that it is the graceful Lord Himself who is the true guru for all and the One who appears as a human guru enlightening the ripe soul as to its divine inheritance and enabling it to experience the eternal truth within himself. For the liberated man of Saiva Siddhanta the world and his fellowmen do not lose their significance; much less do they cease to be real – in fact, he is a man of two worlds; he lives in the world but transcends it; he is literally 'dead' to the world of his own ego as it is the Divine that acts through him. Souls are swayed by the two cardinal passions, attachment and hate and come under the grip of Karma, action carried out in the fulfilment of desires good and bad. Thus, control of desires created by the need for gratification of the senses is a pre-requisite for monastic life when the progressive realization of truth is accomplished through the ten stages of the soul's journey to mukti, referred to in Saiva Siddhanta as "Dasa Kariya", - eliminating the insubstantial nature of the world of the soul through knowledge of the true nature of the world (of 36 tattvas) and self-knowledge (consciousness) leading ultimately to God who is Himself the illuminator of the soul's consciousness. Once freed from bondage, the jeevanmukta lives and seemingly acts but

these actions do not find him anymore because he is completely free of all passions. Saiva Siddhanta holds that even in mukti, the liberated souls do not lose their individuality even while enjoying the bliss of union with God Siva – a state of purity free from sin and pain. It is said that a description of this state is difficult indeed – even the great Buddha is believed to have declined not only to answer whether there is a god or not but also to elaborate on the subject of the liberated man for the simple reason that nothing definite can be said about the liberated except to say that charity and moral conduct are equally important as concentration and higher wisdom as vital factors on the way to enlightenment. The spiritual progress in each succeeding stage of the ‘Dasa Kariya’ of Saiva Siddhanta is likened to that of gold which is purified more and more by repeated heating in the goldsmiths’ fire. In the final analysis, total surrender to Siva, the God of love is the acme of liberated life on earth.

6. IN SEARCH OF SARVAMUKTI

The Hindu ideal of spiritual socialism is enshrined in its holy scriptures (The Vedas, the Bhagavad Gita, the Tevaram of Saiva Tamil Saints) and has been well exemplified in recent times by Swami Vivekananda. We must recognize that all religious traditions affirm the spiritual nature of humanity and especially the divine spark in all human beings which underlines the unity of all of us grounded and crowned in a greater ultimate unity which is greater than the recognition of it in each of our religious faith traditions. The paramount need of today is for all religions to abandon exclusivist claims and to engage in creative dialogue between leaders of all faiths. Knowledge must result in action – and here it should result in a genuine and open inter-faith encounter. Just as the sun, reflected in a dozen vessels of differing shapes and sizes does not lost its unity, so do all the great religions of mankind reflect different aspects of the same divinity without in anyway diluting the overriding sovereignty of the divine. Hinduism has this glowing vision of mankind as a great family and this vision can be abstracted from all the great religious traditions of the world. Let us then seek from religion not conflict but concord – a new dimension of consciousness, a movement from fanaticism to mutual respect, from competition to creative interaction.

7. MAN’S QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY

We live in a world acclaimed as the golden age of science and technology, perhaps a semblance of paradise on earth at least in the developed west. But everywhere today man is disintegrating from within. We are perplexed by a world dominated by guided missiles but misguided men at the helm of affairs. The so called civilized man finds that the riches and pleasures of life cannot bring him lasting joy – sooner or later he discovers the emptiness that invariably accompanies a life which has no higher values transcending the tangible goods of this world. We yearn for a joy that lasts, a peace that endures and for a freedom that is total in mind, body and spirit. Though the householder’s life is not considered a hindrance to man’s quest for immortality, the Vedas are emphatic that the only condition is that one should lead a life according to moral law and truth, and displaying love and compassion to all that live, by his hard labor and by his acceptance of the pain and misery of life but maintaining equanimity. Although Hinduism is clear on the role of ignorance as the cause of bondage and also on the

role of higher saving knowledge (paravidya) as the way to liberation, the ends and means for a liberated life seem to revolve on the cessation of all desires of the heart as the king-pin of this whole process of a revolutionary new perception of the same old world of ours when the limitation of the non-self is transcended and the freed – mukta lives in the plenitude of being. The Seer sees no suffering nor death; he sees only the All, God everywhere.

THE SIDDHANTA CONCEPT OF JEEVANMUKTI

The teaching of the Upanishads shows a progressive trend from the monistic view which considers knowledge as the sole means to liberation, leading to the manifestly monotheistic view that accepts action and devotion to God and self-surrender to Him as direct means to salvation. It is true to say that this theistic trend which is predominant in the later Upanishads finds its fulfilment in Saiva Siddhanta. In the Svetasvatara it is the personal Lord, Rudra Siva who is the origin and end of the universe while the Katha speaks clearly of the inadequacy of self-effort to attain mukti and of the absolute need for divine grace.

“This Lord (atman) is not to be obtained by instruction nor by intellect nor by much learning. He is to be obtained only by the one whom he chooses. To such a one the Lord reveals his own person”.

This aspect of the mechanics of revelation and grace of the Lord is the bedrock of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy and in particular its concept of jeevanmukti. The Lord Siva’s own revelation and grace given unto the devoted bhakta is the essence of Saiva-Bhakti literature and indeed is the constant refrain of the hymns of the Saiva saints from Saint Thirumoolar to Saint Sekkilar. Mukti is freedom from the eternal bondage of the soul; as in other Indian systems, to the question when and how the soul came to be in bondage there is no answer – bondage is accepted as the existential situation of the soul. Ignorance (avidya or Anava) is deemed to be beginningless and is the basis of dependent origination and for the desire for existence.

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